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HOME-CURED MEAT

HOW TO PROTECT IT

FROM INSECTS

Leaflet No. 385

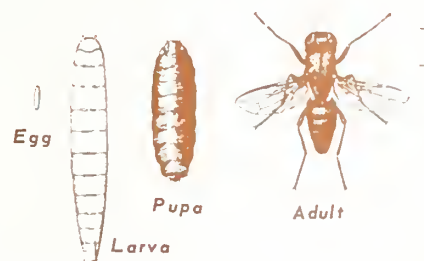
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Washington, D. C.



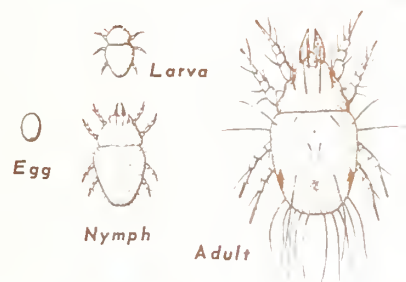
Pests of Stored Meat

The **ham or cheese skipper** gets its name from the jumping habit of the larvae (fig. 1). The flies are about one-third to one-half the size of houseflies and are very active, flying about most of the time. They lay their eggs on meat and cheese and multiply rapidly.



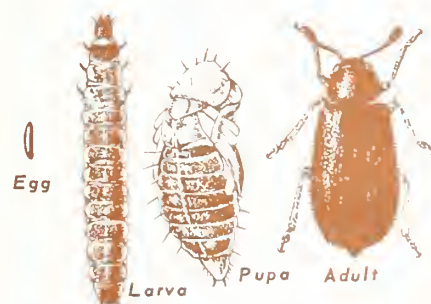
1

Mites are not insects, but cause damage to meat and cheese similar to that of insects (fig. 2). They are very small and cannot fly. They crawl around extensively and may be carried from one place to another by insects.



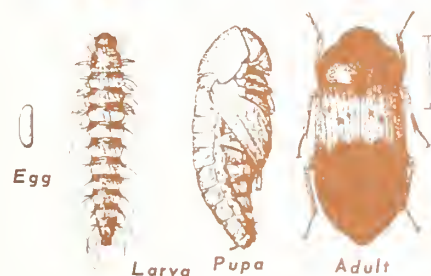
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The **red-legged ham beetle** is often a pest of cured meats and meat products (fig. 3). The adults are metallic blue-green in color, with reddish legs. The adults may also feed on skipper larvae as well as meat.



3

The **larder beetle** is typical of several species of beetles and their fuzzy larvae that feed on meat and cheese (fig. 4). The adults are strong fliers.



4

General Preventive Measures

CLEAN UP. Eliminate breeding places of meat-house pests. Such insects and mites feed and breed on many animal products and by-products. Even grease and tiny scraps of meat or cheese lodged in cracks in shelves, walls, and floors harbor them.

Brush and scrub thoroughly, with soapy water, all places where meat has been or is to be stored. Give special attention to cleaning out cracks in shelves and floors. Smokehouses that are to be free of meat for any length of time should be cleaned as soon as the last meat is removed, and then sprayed as discussed below.

Keep all meat scraps in tight containers until they can be rendered.

Slaughter and cure meat during cold weather while insects are inactive. Protect meat before insects become active in the spring.

Proper Storage

Store meat in a clean, tight, well-ventilated smokehouse or room.

Keep flies, ants, and other insects out of meat storerooms, as they can carry mites. Be sure all doors and windows fit tightly. Cover all openings with fine screen having not less than 30 meshes to the inch.

Use of Insecticides

After the storage area is cleaned, apply a spray before meat is brought in. Use a spray made by mixing one of the following materials with water in the proportions given:

1. Three ounces of a 25-percent lindane wettable powder to each gallon of water.
2. One pound of a 50-percent DDT or methoxychlor wettable powder to each 2½ gallons of water.

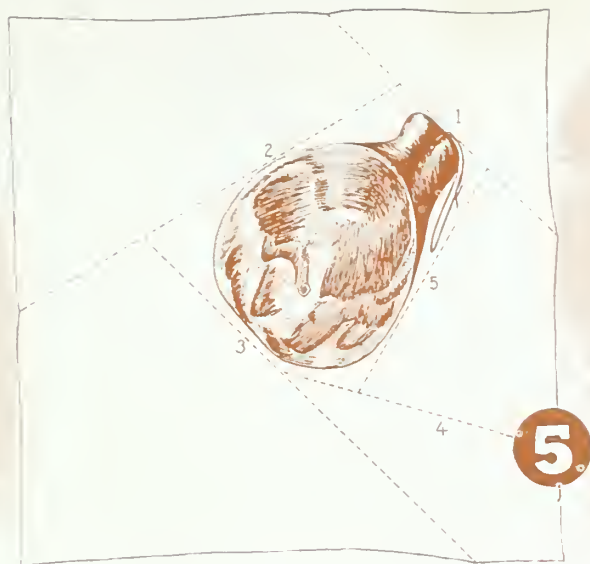
In using these mixtures, keep them well stirred to prevent the powder from settling. On painted or nonabsorbent surfaces you can use emulsifiable concentrates of these insecticides, diluted with water, to avoid the spotty deposit left by wettable powders. The emulsions are less effective on porous or absorbent surfaces. In diluting the concentrate, follow the portion of the directions on the label of the container that calls for the addition of the smallest amount of water.

Use lindane if mites are a problem, as DDT or methoxychlor will not be effective. A pyrethrum insecticide is also useful against mites, but it must hit them at the time of application and may have to be used periodically because it does not have a lasting effect. When mites infest meat, they are usually on the surface and can be brushed off.

When cured meat is held during the summer and fall, apply supplementary insecticide treatments with a paintbrush to floors, walls, ends of racks, or other surfaces where insects or mites may crawl. Make these treatments every 3 months until cold weather begins. Be careful not to get any insecticide on meat or on surfaces that come in contact with meat. Careful brush application will avoid this and also eliminate possible contamination from drifting mist that would result from application with a sprayer.

Protection of Hams

There are several methods that can be used around the home to protect a small number of cured hams. Pick the method best suited to your needs.



1. EMBEDDING. In the South where cottonseed hulls are readily available, they offer a simple, cheap, and effective way of protecting hams from skippers. Get a carton or box that will allow 3 or 4 inches on all sides of the ham, put in cottonseed hulls, and place the ham in the middle, surrounded by hulls. Inspect the hams about once a month to be sure that the meat is keeping well. If the cottonseed hulls become infested with grain beetles, discard them and add new ones.

An old-fashioned but effective way of protecting hams from skippers is simply to bury them in a bin of oats or other grain. Tie one end of a string around the ham, run the other end to the surface of the grain, and attach a tag so the meat can easily be located.

2. WRAPPING AND HANGING. Wrap each piece separately and securely, being sure there is no insect life on the meat. To wrap, lay the ham or other cured meat on heavy wrapping paper. The string used to hang the meat for smoking should be folded on the inside or removed. Fold the paper as shown by dotted lines, in the order indicated by numbers (fig. 5).



Place the wrapped meat in a closely woven cloth sack (fig. 6). Be careful to keep the sack free of grease. Check the bag and wrapping for holes through which insects might enter.

Loop the top of the sack and tie tightly with string or single-strand rustproof wire. Use this string or wire to hang meat in storage (fig. 7). Hang pieces so they do not touch and rats cannot reach them.

Examine the meat monthly to check its condition and put on a new paper wrapper. Changing the wrapper is especially important if it is grease-soaked or has any holes in it.

3. **LOW TEMPERATURE.** Storing cured meat at temperatures below 45° F. will prevent growth of insects. Freezing will not spoil the meat.

4. **BORAX.** Some antiskipper compounds contain borax and should not be used. The borax is considered harmful if eaten by human beings, and it also hardens and toughens the meat.

Fumigation

In meat storages that are tightly constructed, fumigation can be used to control infestation in meat or the storage structure. Sometimes periodic fumigations are also used as a preventive measure. Fumigation should be done only by experienced operators who are familiar with proper procedures and know how to handle the dangerous gases used.

Infested Meat

If meat becomes infested in spite of your precautions, remove it from the storeroom and trim out any infested parts. Cut deep enough to remove all larvae that may have traveled into the meat along the bone or through layers of fat. The uninfested part of the meat is safe to eat, but should be used rather promptly. Protect the exposed lean of trimmed meat by greasing it with salad oil or melted fat to delay molding or drying.

**Federal Extension Service
Agricultural Marketing Service
April 1955**

Approved for reprinting August 1960
Supersedes AIS-52, Protect Home-Cured Meat From Insects

